



Naomi Shihab Nye

Author

Naomi Shihab Nye's Poetry Highlights Cultural Crossroads

Raised by a Palestinian father and an American mother, Naomi Shihab Nye shows the influence of her home's dual cultures in her writing.

A winner of four Pushcart Prizes and the Paterson Poetry Prize, plus the Jane Addams Children's Book Award for her novel *Habibi* and picture book *Sitti's Secrets*, Nye draws upon the experience of being raised in different cultures.

"I grew up with a great love for the Middle East and a fascination with it and a desire to travel there and know my family there," Nye said.

Nye's parents encouraged her to write at a young age. By the first grade she was writing poetry and sent work to

be published in a magazine shortly after.

"I had parents who really cared about language and about communication and about using words properly," Nye said. "I think from hearing my parents tell stories and read to us before we could read ourselves, I developed a fascination with what words could do."

A collection of Nye's poems published in 2002, called *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, features her work about the Arab world, peace and being Arab American. A poem in the collection called "Steps" highlights the immigrant experience in America.

"Paint dries more quickly in English. The thick swoops and curls of Arabic letters stay moist and glistening till tomorrow when



the children show up jingling their dimes. They have learned the currency of the new world. ... One of these children will tell a story that keeps her people alive."

Nye, who lives in Texas, wakes up daily at 5 a.m. to begin writing. For aspiring writers, she suggests taking a few moments daily if time is an issue.

"I try to encourage people to know that even seven minutes or 10 minutes a day devoted to your own writing can be very beneficial. You don't have to have a full hour," Nye said. "I think in the modern world how to negotiate our own sense of time is one of the most crucial elements in life that we each have to develop."

When it comes to publishing, Nye said aspiring authors need to find self-confidence.

"It also involves, at times, a basic kind of courage just to share something you have written and not have to apologize for it," Nye said. "That little bit of bravado of belief that helps someone share their work — that is one of the issues."

Naomi Shihab Nye at her book signing of *Honeybee*. © Wikimedia commons; Top photo by Chehalis Hegner



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Ahmed Ahmed, Comedian

Moustapha Akkad, Film Director

Michael DeBakey, Heart Surgeon

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Kahlil Gibran, Artist and Poet

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Salma Hayek, Actress

Casey Kasem, Radio Broadcaster

DJ Khaled, Rap Music Artist

Khalid Khannouchi, Marathon Runner

Ferial Masry, Community Activist

Christa McAuliffe, Teacher in Space

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Ameen Rihani, Poet

Edward Said, Author and Activist

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Betty Shamieh, Playwright

Rashida Tlaib, Politician

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